Theme 2: Learning on the Edge

The frontiers of change – political, social, technological- are “edge” places: places of both excitement and uncertainty, where the future becomes the present, for better or for worse. Organizations live on these edges daily: navigating the transitions emerging from Artificial Intelligence, remote work, digital transformation, social and environmental justice responsibilities, as well as edges that have yet to come into view. To do this strategically requires fostering a workforce that is continually learning. In fact, we could say that learning is the future of work.

“Learning on the Edge” will draw from the fields of sociology psychology, neuroscience, entrepreneurship, and educational theory to explore such questions as: How do we spot the “edge places” and know which are paths to push forward, vs. cliffs to step back from? What are the new ways of thinking about capability development that support learning on the edge? How can formal and informal learning structures evolve along specific business edges? How might learning amidst “edgy” uncertainty expand continuous improvement and improve engagement, productivity, and retention?

The Edge Effect: (October 2023) Learning on the Edge is not about the standard curriculum; it’s about engaging and struggling with problems as they arise and having a culture of “radical candor,” where trying out the limits of how far we can go (the edges) is promoted without repercussions, where there are plentiful opportunities for growth, and where we embrace discomfort. In this session we aim to take a deep dive into what we mean by learning edges, how we can visualize the edges in ways that shape learning and performance in organizations, how we can redefine the employee journey along these learning edges, and what it looks when productive deliberations shape organizational learning. What does a dynamic development model look like, one that supports learning at the edge?

Global and Social Edges: (December 2023) Global politics, social injustice, environmental crisis: in today’s world organizations need to operate more sustainably and responsibly, and the change cannot be merely superficial. As organizations try to figure out their role in society, actively working on the global and social edges is imperative. We will explore questions such as what does long term adaptability and sustainability look like within a community, an organization, a state, a nation? What characteristics define sustainable leadership? How can we gain better alignment between the values within and the values “out there”? How is alignment accomplished when pressures and multiple interests diverge in a global solution?

Technological and Temporal Edges: (March 2024) Schedules, deadlines, past, future: our temporal perceptions affect how, when, and with whom we work. Technologies also affect us; AI for example is creating opportunities and disruptions all around us. Working at the temporal and technological edges can bring more uncertainty even as they make the organization more competitive. In this session we will explore questions such as what assumptions regarding time and tech are operating in our organization? How do they help or hinder learning? How can temporal and technological practices create rhythms (or dissonance) in teams? What are the necessary capabilities that expand our understanding of temporal and technological edges during times of disruption?

Summit: Learning on the Edge: Constructing a path forward while surrounded by uncertainty. We will wrap up our exploration by inviting scholars and practitioners to reflect on the year’s insights, as well as looking into practical applications for the research.
LILA Proposed Theme for 2023-2024 with Member Feedback

Member Feedback on Theme: LEARNING ON THE EDGE

What is valuable:
- Feels equally valuable; topic may help me start to make meaning and take some effective action (Teresa)
- Aligns really well with our work, specifically as artificial intelligence and machine learning starts to really take root in the everyday conversation (Ben)
- A lot of the elements in the brief are similar to the things that we're wrestling with, e.g. artificial intelligence, and what it means for human interaction (Leigh)
- How can leaders use radical candor and engage in conversations and learning around these topics? This is tricky in the workplace because people are afraid to do/say things that might hurt their/the organization's brand (Tony)
- This brings in both organizational culture as well as everything that's happening in the world around (Eric)
- Brings up my sense of identity and how I see myself in this org culture and in this world, and how these things impact my willingness to play at the edge, or my willingness not to play at the edge (Eric)
- What does ‘dynamic development’ look like resonates with me (Ben)
- The second theme would be very much a benefit to us (Army War College) for a number of reasons: there's a lot of attention in our culture on the importance of historical mindedness and learning from that, as we cast into the future environments. We could also learn from gaining an ‘edge mindedness’ that doesn’t necessarily exist even with the technological mindedness that is inherent in our operating culture. (Abby)

What is missing:
- If we take on this theme, a monthly topic/conversation around machine learning: what is it, how do people do it, and how does it compare and contrast to ‘real learning’ (which machine learning is not) (Ben)
- How are systems built to push back or tamp down any interventions to change them? (Ben)
- When we think about learning on the edge, we're often thinking about technology. How do we understand the global and social themes surrounding more than just what's the new emerging big idea? How do we responsibly engage with it, and what does it mean for social and human connections? (Leigh)
- How do we get people to be more capable, self-assured, self-competent to ‘play on the edge’, because we need them to play on the edge, both for what our organizations need and also to thrive in life (Eric)
- Helpful to have clarity if we’re talking about individual learning (mindset and skills) or organization level learning (process and practice) (Ben)
- The experience that I’m having on my own team is related to this: the pace of learning has accelerated to the point that adult learners need to see relevance as a motivation for why they’re learning something (Ben)